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From centimetres to seconds

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Dialogues Symposium – What is Sound Design?

Dr Sean Williams

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AV: projector and audio (standard)

Abstract for 25 minute paper:

From centimetres to seconds: sound design's shift from technical serialism to musically informed performance practice in the 1950s WDR Studio, Cologne

Music made in the West Deutsche Rundfunk Studio for Electronic Music in the 1950s was characterized by a strict serialist determination of all sound parameters. In Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Studie II*, and *Gesang der Jünglinge*, sounds as short as 0.05 seconds were designed and had to be realised with particular frequencies, dynamics and envelope shapes. The time and effort needed to achieve such exact detail was making it impossible to produce longer pieces, so something had to change.

I demonstrate how sound design and realization processes evolved during the production of *Gesang der Jünglinge*, from editing together hundreds of tiny pieces of tape to creating complex structures lasting several seconds using more performative and gestural techniques.

Sean Williams

Biog

Dr. Sean Williams is a Leverhulme Early Career research fellow in the Reid School of Music, University of Edinburgh, researching by practice the live and studio practices of early electronic music. He builds electronic instruments and performs with these in the ensembles *Grey Area* and the *Monosynth Orchestra*.